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TAGS: PREL PGOV KMFO KPAL EG IS

SUBJECT: DAS GRAY DISCUSSES MULTI-NATIONAL FORCE AND
OBSERVERS WITH MFA OFFICIAL

REF: SECDEF 201818

Classified by Charge d'Affaires Stuart Jones for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) On June 13, NEA Deputy Assistant Secretary Gordon Gray discussed the potential for a draw-down in the U.S. troop contribution to the Multi-National Force and Observers (MFO) with MFA Acting Assistant Minister for Legal Affairs and Treaties Hussein Mubarak. The meeting was convened at Mubarak's request. Mubarak reiterated Egypt's strong objection to potential USG plans to decrease the U.S. MFO troop contingent from 680 to 250 soldiers.

¶2. (C) Such a move, Mubarak said, would symbolize that the Egypt, Israel, Levant region is of decreasing importance to the United States. Now is a particularly bad time to signal a lesser U.S. role in regional affairs, he continued, in the midst of the escalating crises in Gaza and Lebanon. In addition, Hussein said, the loss of U.S. troops would leave a "psychological gap," even if replacements were found from other countries. Hussein also criticized the idea of replacing U.S. soldiers with forces from private security companies, saying that because the MFO represents state-to-state relations, the troops should thus correspondingly be "formal and official."

¶3. (C) Gray responded that a formal decision on whether or not to decrease the U.S. MFO troop contingent has not been made and will depend upon a review of the issue currently being undertaken in the Department of Defense. Gray noted that Secretary of Defense Gates had initiated this review when Minister of Defense Tantawi raised similar points during Gates' April 18 visit to Cairo (reftel).

¶4. (U) DAS Gray has cleared this message.
JONES